

Montague Planning Board

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Tuesday, July 26, 2011

Town Hall Upstairs Conference Room

MEETING MINUTES

Board Members Present: Robert Obear, Fred Bowman, Ron Sicard, Bruce Young, George Cooke

Board Members Absent: none

Staff Present: Walter Ramsey- Town Planner, David Jensen – Building Inspector

Press Present: Chris Curtis- Greenfield Recorder

Bruce Young called to order the meeting of the Planning Board at 6:33 PM.

MOTION by Ron Sicard to approve the minutes from the June 28, 2011 meeting. Seconded by Bob O'Bear. Motion passes 4-1-0. George Cooke abstaining.

6:30 PM Public Hearing- Zoning Amendment #2011-01: Solar Electric Facilities and Installations

Present: Chris Mason, Sally Pick, Susan Conger (Montague Energy Committee), Amy McDonough (Borrego Solar), Philippe Rigollaud (Pioneer Valley PhotoVoltaics).

MOTION by Ron Sicard to enter public hearing for Zoning Amendment #2011-01: Solar Electric Facilities and Installations. Seconded by Bob Obear. Motion passes 5-0.

Town Planner has reorganized and revised the draft regulations after the last meeting and has incorporated comments from the building inspector, DOER Green Communities representative, the Montague Energy Committee, and local PV industry professionals.

Walter recapped the draft regulation: The intent is to promote solar on rooftops primarily and ground mounted secondarily. The major theme was balancing board control with promotion of small-scale solar energy generation. The discussion centered around the following four conditions in the draft regulations.

-20 foot height limit for accessory ground mounted installations.

The Board discussed the planner's recommended 20 height limit for accessory ground mounted installations. Chris Mason from the energy committee stated that this use should be treated as any other structure and should at least have the same limit as a building (28 feet). He stressed that there needs to be a clear reason for the 20ft limit. Philippe Rigollaud stated that 20ft is not prohibitive for consumers, but it does pose an additional hurdle as it is not uncommon for these installations to extend beyond 20 feet, especially in the winter months. Project economics will not allow the array to extend much above the height. **The Board recommends removing this condition.**

- Accessory ground mounted installations to be located in side or rear yard

According to the Building Inspector, general public and members of the Board, this condition is arbitrary and difficult to regulate. **The Board recommends removing this condition.** The Board concluded that solar installations shall meet all applicable setback requirements for the zone as if it were a structure.

-0.05% of minimum lot size threshold for Accessory ground-mounted solar

The Board agreed that this “sliding scale” metric works for most areas town. The area of challenge is the ½ acre lots. Chris Mason stated that for a ½ acre lot a Special Permit would essentially be required for any system. A special Permit would be an obstacle to installation of solar installations. Philippe Rigollaud described how the additional permit can “break the bank” for potential solar customers. Sally Pick reiterated that any barrier put in front of a consumer is a possible stopping point. The Board discussed the legitimate public interests at stake in the denser areas of town. Bob Obear noted that this threshold affects 10% to 20% of building in town. **The Board will revisit this condition.**

-Large Scale Facilities in the AF-4 zones

Philippe explained some progressive dual-use solar facilities that allow farming to occur symbiotically with solar energy generation. USDA is funding these types of projects. This can really enhance the viability of farms in the community. The Board explained that the intent of not allowing facilities in this zone is to protect farmland and the rural character. The board was not aware of dual-use possibilities. However, the board feels allowing solar facilities on prime farmland is not in the interest of the Town. **The Board will revisit this condition.**

MOTION by Fred Bowman to close public hearing at 8:12 PM for Zoning Amendment #2011-01: Solar Electric Facilities and Installations. Seconded by Bob Obear. Motion passes 5-0.

8:15 PM Public Hearing- Zoning Amendment: #2011-02: Dissolve Limited Business District

None Present

MOTION by Ron Sicard to enter public hearing for Zoning Amendment #2011-01: Solar Electric Facilities and Installations. Seconded by Bob Obear. Motion passes 5-0.

Walter R reported that the notice had been posted and abutter notified. Walter had attempted to contact the property owners on several occasions, using several methods. No public comments had been received prior to the hearing.

MOTION by Ron Sicard to close public hearing at 8:26 PM for Zoning Amendment #2011-01: Solar Electric Facilities and Installations. Seconded by Fred Bowman. Motion passes 5-0.

MOTION by Bruce Young to adjourn Planning Board Meeting at 8:27PM . Moved by Ron Sicard Seconded by Bob Obear. Motion passes 5-0.

Meeting closed at 8:27 PM.

Approved by: _____ Date: _____